

Monroe Avenue Historic District

16-118 Monroe Avenue

Local

State

State Marker ✓ 2/18/74

National ✓ 2/16/75



National Theater, 118 Monroe. (Only remaining building.)

Photo courtesy of DetroitPix

Historic overview:

The Monroe Avenue Historic District contains one of the few relatively intact pre and post Civil War commercial blocks in the City, as well as a theater designed by Albert Kahn. Monroe Avenue is also a portion of a larger area that was one of Detroit's first theater districts.

The older buildings on the block were occupied by a great number of short-term tenants with a wide variety of occupations, including grocers, confectioners, and saloon keepers. The Jewish immigration of the early 20th century contributed several pawnshops and tailors to the block as well as many jewelry shops. These buildings are examples of Victorian commercial architecture, and designed by architects Sheldon and Mortimer Smith during the mid to late 1800s.

Detroit's first movie theater, the Casino, (1906) was located on Monroe Avenue. It was the first of a cluster of nickelodeons that lined the avenue for a number of years. The second theater, the Bijou, later operating as Cinex, also opened in 1906. In 1908 architect C. Howard Crane set up in Detroit, and began to specialize in theater design. He designed approximately fifty theaters in the city. The National Theater, built in 1911, at 118 Monroe is the only known theater ever built which was design by renowned architect Albert Kahn. It became one of the showiest buildings in the downtown area. Currently it is vacant. During the 1920s, Grand Circus Park superseded Monroe Avenue as the center of Detroit's theatrical activity. By the early 1980s most of the Monroe Avenue commercial buildings were vacant and in the late 80s the majority were demolished and replaced with a surface parking lot.

